

President's Annual Report

ROBERT HAMILTON, President

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Indianapolis, Indiana

One of the greatest honors, and the most troublesome burdens it has been my lot to carry came from serving as a county commissioner in the county in which I live. At the conclusion of my term of office, I shall retire. I became a county commissioner of Marion County without previous experience in elected office. I now possess a real appreciation of the problems confronting commissioners in providing suitable drainage and good roads to a community limited by inadequate funds. I shall always carry a deep admiration for the patience, fortitude, and inspiration required to carry a county commissioner through his term of office.

I know of nothing which has made my service to my community more gratifying to me than having been elected President of the Indiana Association of County Commissioners. I believe that no group has contributed more to the improvement of county government than the Indiana Association of County Commissioners. The association was organized in the early thirties. It became particularly active after World War II. I should like at this time to pay tribute to Claude Hodson, the executive secretary of the Association, for his hard work and persistence in building the association to the enviable position it holds.

After a new constitution and by-laws were adopted by the association, district meetings were held regularly throughout the state. These district meetings provided the county commissioners with an opportunity to discuss their problems with each other more frequently. The increased friendship among the county commissioners of the state, and their realization that they possess certain problems in common led to a strong united organization.

The County Commissioners Association, from its re-organization, recognized that the major reason for the inadequacy of county highways was the lack of available funds. The association led the fight to increase the gasoline tax. This struggle was successfully culminated in the General Assembly of 1957. The first great goal of the County Commission-

ers Association, obtaining sufficient funds for the maintenance of county highways, was achieved.

The task of a county commissioner is not only difficult but time consuming. Many competent men and women are unable to seek the office by reason of the salary being insufficient to compensate for the time devoted to serving their community. The association's second ambition was obtaining salaries calculated to attract and to keep in office competent county commissioners. This ambition was also achieved in 1957 when the Indiana General Assembly passed the County Officials Salary Law.

I became president of your association with two major goals of the association already accomplished. Elected with me was a board of directors who have supported me most ably and have furthered the program of the association with loyalty and enthusiasm. We believe that several fundamental contributions to county government were made during the last year. For the first time in the history of the association, the board prepared and published a program for the year. The program was prepared, approved, and published in the magazine of the association. This permits every member of the association and those persons who are our loyal supporters to know our ambitions and to realize that any contributions they might make will be directed toward desirable improvement in county government.

The program of the association was accompanied by a budget which for the first time provided information to all of the commissioners and to the interested public concerning the manner in which association funds will be spent.

It has been difficult to operate an association of public officials without an adequate source of finance. The association during the past year has taken over the operation of the Indiana Association of County Commissioners magazine, which has a circulation of 2,500 persons. Its advertising is of great value to business men supplying material and services to local government. The association is beginning to maintain itself upon a sound financial basis, as the result of publishing the magazine. The magazine is also carrying the story of the improvement in local government supported by the county commissioners to those persons who can provide help in achieving our ambition.

The attention of all of the people of the United States has been focused upon the highway problem through the efforts of the federal government to provide substantial support to local highway funds. For many years federal aid has been available for the secondary highway construction and maintenance in our counties. The counties of Indiana have not participated substantially in this program. The Indiana Association of County Commissioners in co-operation with the State Highway

Department has undertaken a program which has resulted in almost 100 per cent use of federal aid funds for secondary roads by the counties of the state.

A task remains for accomplishment by the next board and officers of your association. Many of the counties of the state have waived their privilege of using federal funds, thus making the funds available to other counties. We hope that all of the counties will participate in the use of federal funds for the improvement of their secondary roads.

Some members of the last General Assembly expressed concern because they have been unable to determine the costs of maintaining particular types of county highways and the cost of constructing these highways. The County Commissioners Association, the State Highway Department and Indiana University are co-operating in a project to develop a sound cost-accounting technique for the county highway departments of the state. This program is not designed to tell the counties how to spend their highway funds. It is designed to permit the counties to determine whether or not the funds are spent economically. The project will be completed within the next 18 months.

The association's board has approved a model county highway ordinance which it has urged state counties to adopt. This ordinance provides for orderly planning of county highway maintenance and construction and for suitable use of technical assistance in carrying out the plans adopted.

The cost of government regardless of the economy of its operation is a burden upon the taxpayer. The road in front of your neighbor's house will not be suitable until it has the convenience of an expressway. County commissioners must realize that the funds available will always be insufficient to provide the services expected by the communities they serve. We must educate our communities to recognize the limitations placed upon county government spending and we must operate county government with the ultimate in efficiency and economy. We must not permit any group with false promises of improvement in county government to deprive the people of their control over that government. County government under the control of commissioners elected by the people will be more seriously threatened during the coming two years than it has ever been threatened before. County commissioners must recognize the need for improvement in county government and make the necessary improvements before deficiencies in county government provide an excuse for destroying popular local government.

I am proud to have served as your president. I am deeply grateful for the co-operation and the enthusiasm displayed by your board during the past year. You shall always have my good wishes and active support in your future endeavors.